

**James Madison to Richard Rush, June 27, 1817.
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TO RICHARD RUSH. MAD. MSS.

Montpellier, June 27, 1817

Dear Sir, —I have recd. your two favors of the 18 & 20th inst.¹ I am promised a visit from Mr. Jefferson the ensuing month, and shall not fail to communicate to him the one you note for that purpose.

¹ Rush was serving as Secretary of State *ad interim* until John Quincy Adams entered upon his duties September 22, 1817.

I readily conceive that Mr. Correa,² may feel some conflict in his present position, between his two characters of Philanthropist and Plenipotentiary; and that he may infer some indulgence towards the latter from a respect to the former. He ought not however to impose on you a conflict between this kind feeling in the Govt. and its self-respect. It is both illiberal & impolitic, and necessarily extorts the admonitions you so gently convey to him.

² José Correa da Serra, Minister Plenipotentiary of Portugal from July 22, 1816, to November 9, 1820, was a noted figure in Washington society. He was the author of the saying that Washington was a "city of magnificent distances." The difficulty alluded to in this letter arose from a publication in the *National Intelligencer* of May 22, by the Legation, of the blockade of the port of Pernambuco and adjacent coasts. On May 24 Rush wrote

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the Minister to ask if the publication was authoritative, and, being informed that it was, on May 28 addressed him a stiff note, saying he should have addressed his information to the government and not to the public.— *D. of S. MSS. Notes.*

In assuming a guardianship of our character in Europe, he committed to say the least, a marked indelicacy; and his avowed resort to the Press as the medium of giving information to the public here, was a still greater aberration. His regard for our National reputation if sincere, might have been manifested in a less exceptionable mode, than in an *official* conversation. And his consciousness of the wrongfulness of a direct communication to the people, is betrayed by the flimsiness of his apology. A silly reason from a wise man is never the true one.

The British doctrine of Blockades has given rise to error &

irregularity in the practice of other nations. In strictness, the blockade notifies itself, and no other notification can be admitted by Neutrals who understand their rights as having any other effect, than as a friendly caution agst. a probable danger. But even in this sense, the notification ought to be to the Govt. which may make the use of it deemed proper. This Govt. has never formally promulgated the blockades, more than any other regulations of foreign Govts. The most that seems admissible in such cases, is to let the public be informally apprized of them that individuals may not ignorantly incur just penalties. In one instance an answer was given by the Dept. of State to a notification of a B. Blockade by Mr. Merry, which according to my recollection explained the sense in which it was recd. and precluded the idea, that anything short of an *actual* attempt to violate a *legal* blockade, could subject neutral vessels to interruption on the high seas. Notwithstanding these views of the subject, I am not sure, that foreign Consuls in our ports may not have addressed notifications to our Merchants through the Newspapers. And it may be worth enquiry whether something of the sort was not done by Mr. Onis, perhaps prior to his reception as public Minister.

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It is to be regretted that any difficulties should have arisen with Portugal, the only recognized Nation, beside ourselves on this Hemisphere, and particularly that the most enlightened and esteemed foreigner among us should be the pivot on which they turn. It is not the less necessary however, to make these considerations, as you are making them, subordinate to the rights of our Country and the honor of its Govt. As far as these will permit, conciliation can in no case be more properly intermingled.

May not the event at Pernambuco, if not caused by actual oppression, tend to give at the present moment an unfavorable turn to the sentiment of European Sovereigns in relation to the revolutionary Scene in S. America? The struggle of the Spanish part of it having the appearance of shaking off a *foreign yoke*, appeals merely to the interest & sympathy of those Sovereigns. That in the Brazils, may be viewed by them as an attack on a *domestic* throne; and as adding an example in the New World, to those which have inspired so much alarm in the Old.